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RAJA RAMMOHUN ROY

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RAJA RAMMOHUN ROY

by

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SAHITYA AKADEMI

NEW DELHI

SAHITYA AKADEMI

Rabindra Bhavan, Ferozeshah Road, New Delhi-1
Rabindra Sarobar Stadium, Block 5B, Calcutta-9
14 Cathedral Garden Road, Madras-34

First published 1966

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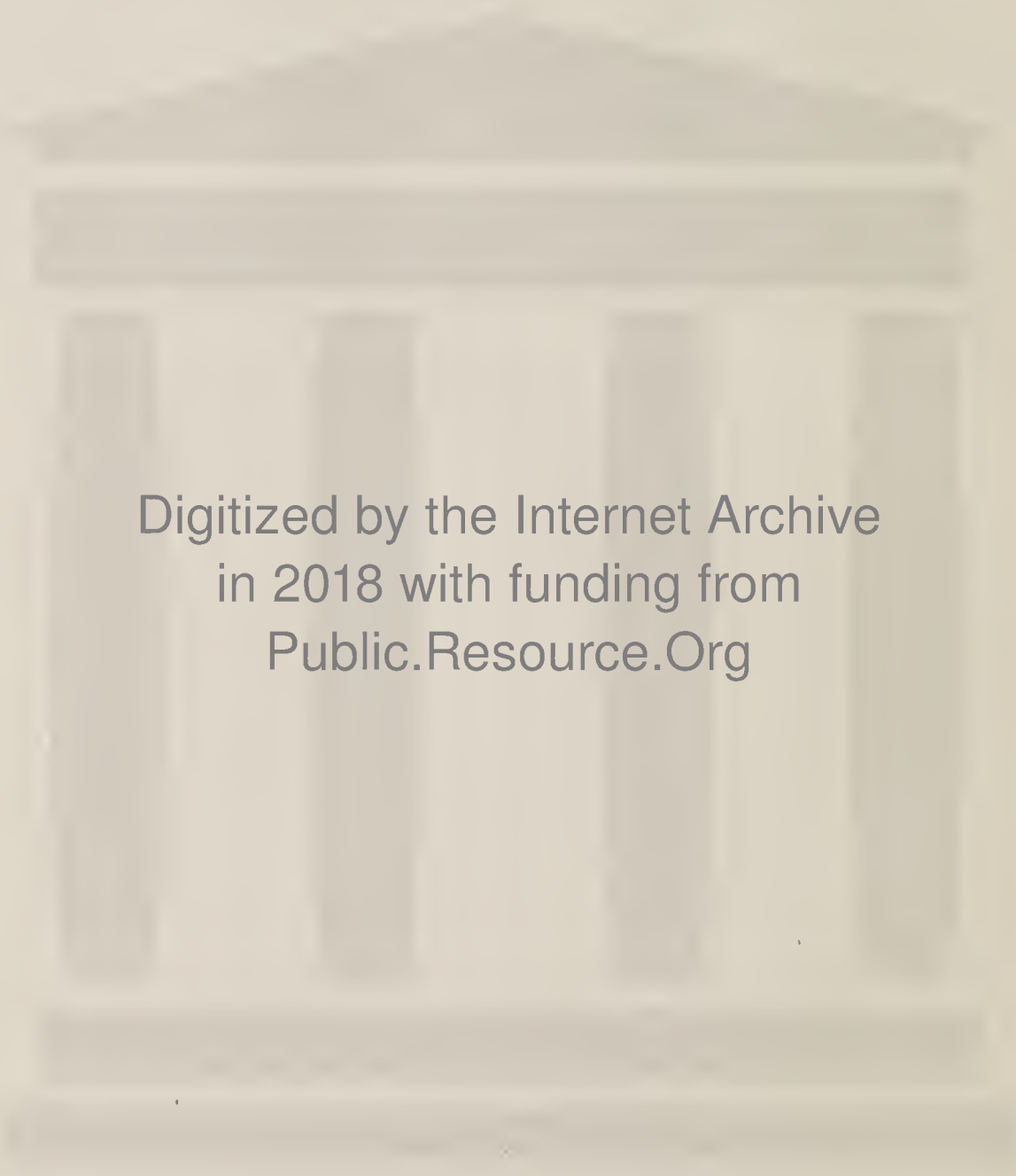
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Published by Sahitya Akademi and printed by S. C. Ghose at
Calcutta Press Private Limited, 1, Raja Subodh Mallick
Square, Calcutta-13

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Darkness before Dawn

It was indeed the darkest period in modern Indian history. Old society and polity had crumbled and the ruins of an old social order lay scattered on all sides. As yet there was no force which could clear the debris and there was no attempt made to rebuild on the ancient foundations. Dead traditions, fossilised customs and irrational bigotry had choked the life-stream of the nation. Knowledge had been lost. It was a period of unrelenting darkness. At that moment of barrenness and drought came Rammohun Roy.

Great men are the focal points of the concentrated creative energy of time-force that invisibly operates in the history of human civilisation. Emergence is never at variance with continuity in the cultural history of the race, and history is as much a creation of the human personality as the human personality is conditioned by history.

The fruitfulness and the greatness of the human personality lie in its capacity to understand the central task of the epoch, in its ability to grasp the essence of historical flow and ultimately in its firm and heroic resolve to make the maximum creative effort for the fulfilment of the task. In the process of its highest creative activity the human personality becomes a strange mixture of opposite qualities. It becomes impersonal to the highest degree as well as intensely personal. It is impersonal in the sense that not a speck of ego-dust is allowed to sully the ideal, and it is personal in the sense that the ideal almost realises a physical reality in a particular human being. It is a rare phenomenon in human history, but it occurs again and again.

When Rammohun Roy appeared on the stage of Indian history in the latter part of the eighteenth century, Muslim rule was crumbling down. The British, who had come to India as merchants, were slowly turning themselves into rulers. The battle of Plassey had already sealed the fate of Bengal fifteen years earlier, in 1757, and in spite of the prevailing chaos, the

shape of the new order of things was emerging slowly. The West, heralded by Britain, had come to India not merely as an agent of commerce, but as an instrument of history, destined to shake India out of her stupor and to release a new tide of thought and activity in the old river-bed of her history.

In the past, after the advent of the Muslims in India, many great men of vision had appeared to fulfil the historical necessity of forging a synthesis between the thought-world of Hinduism and that of Islam. Dadu, Kabir, Guru Nanak and a host of great path-finders had played their part in this great mission. This task could be achieved not by an eclectic process, which implies the holding together of independent elements by a bond that is external, but by a synthetic process which signifies the realisation of inter-dependence amongst different elements, held together by an inner process of co-ordination, relation and unity. To achieve this synthetic unity with the West was the central task of the epoch, and Rammohun Roy was India's man of destiny in that particular period of history.

Birth and Early Struggle

On 22 May, 1772, Rammohun Roy was born in the village of Radhanagore, then a part of the district of Burdwan and later a part of the Arambagh subdivision of the Hooghly district of Bengal. It was a tiny village which nestled on the northern side of a prosperous and reputed village called Khanakul-Krishnanagore. Khanakul-Krishnanagore was famous in those days as a seat of Hindu culture. Rammohun Roy was born in an orthodox Brahmin family, the members of which had for a long time been in the service of the Mohammedan rulers of Murshidabad. Rammohun's father, Ramkanta Roy, was an orthodox Hindu strictly following the Sastras, and his mother, Phulthakurani, was a woman of intelligence and considerable firmness of character.

Phulthakurani had two sons, Rammohun and Jagmohun, and a daughter. Rammohun had his first rudiments of study in the

village school and also studied Persian under a Maulavi. After some years of study in the village home, Rammohun's father sent him to Patna, the then seat of Islamic learning where Rammohun studied the Arabic and the Persian, the Koran, Islamic theology, as also what could be had through Arabic translations of Euclid and Aristotle. He was greatly influenced by the democratic teachings of the Koran and by the development of logic in Arabic thought and the rationality of some of their schools of thought, notably the Mutazilas¹ and the philosophy of the Sufis.

After his return from Patna, Rammohun undertook the writing of a treatise on the idolatry and superstitions prevailing in Hindu society. His father, who was extremely orthodox in his views, ordered Rammohun to leave the house. Rammohun left the house and took to wandering from place to place. During his wanderings he visited Tibet, where he incurred the displeasure of the Tibetan Lamas by his criticism of the idolatry that had crept into Buddhism.

About this period of his life Rammohun wrote in his 'Autobiographical Sketch': 'When about the age of sixteen, I composed a manuscript calling in question the validity of the idolatrous system of the Hindus. This, together with my known sentiments of the subject, having produced a coolness between me and my immediate kindred, I proceeded on my travels and passed through different countries chiefly within, but some beyond, the bounds of Hindusthan.'

At the end of some years' wanderings, Rammohun went to Varanasi where he studied Hindu philosophy for a number of years. Rammohun's father passed away in 1803, and a short while after that Rammohun shifted to Murshidabad.

While in Murshidabad he wrote the treatise *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin* (A Gift to the Monotheists) in Persian with an Introduction in Arabic.

In the introduction Rammohun pointed out the general unity of thought among mankind regarding the existence of

¹ The rationalistic school of Mutazila was founded by Wasil b. Ata and Amr. b. Ubaid in the eighth century A.D. at Basra.

One Being, and the differences among them when they start giving peculiar attributes to that Being. Condemning the narrowness of the sectarians, he wrote: 'I travelled in the remotest parts of the world, in plains as well as in hilly lands, and I found the inhabitants thereof agreeing generally in believing in the existence of One Being who is the source of creation and the Governor of it, and disagreeing in giving peculiar attributes to that Being and in holding different creeds consisting of the doctrines of religion and precepts of *Harām* (forbidden) and *Halāl* (legal). From this induction I have come to the conclusion that turning generally towards One Eternal Being is a natural tendency in human beings and is common to all individuals of mankind equally. And the inclination of each sect of mankind to a particular God or Gods, holding certain especial attributes, and to some peculiar forms of worship or devotion is an excrescent quality grown in mankind by habit and training.'

In this treatise Rammohun dealt with the question of rational approach to religions and religious experience. He wrote: 'Happy is the State of those persons who are able to discriminate between what is the result of habit and frequent association, and those intrinsic qualities which are the results of cravings of nature in species and individuals, and try their utmost to make an enquiry into the truth and falsehood of the different principles of religion held by different people, unbiased in favour of any one, and scrutinize even those propositions which are admitted by all without looking into the position of those persons by whom they have been asserted.'

He stressed the necessity of a comparative study of religions and drew attention to the achievement of monotheism throughout the world. 'There is always an innate faculty existing in the nature of mankind,' he wrote, 'that in case any person of sound mind, before or after assuming the doctrines of any religion, makes an enquiry into the nature of the principles of religious doctrines, primary or secondary, laid down by different nations, without partiality and with a sense of justice, there is a strong hope that he will be able to distinguish the truth from untruth and the true proposition from the fallacious one, and

also he, becoming free from the useless restraints of religion, which sometimes become sources of prejudice of one against another and causes of physical and mental troubles, will turn to the One Being who is the fountain of the harmonious organisation of the universe, and will pay attention to the good of the society.'

Blind belief and the inability to make enquiry into the sequence between the cause and the effect are responsible for the existence of superstitions and ignorance. As he put it: 'They through the influence of habit and custom and blindness to the enquiry into the sequence between the cause and effect, believe the bathing in a river and worshipping a tree or being a monk and purchasing forgiveness of their crime from the high priests, etc. (according to the peculiarities of different religions) to be the cause of the salvation and purification from sins of a whole life. And they think that this purification is the effect of these objects of their beliefs and the miracle of their priests and not the result of their own belief and whims, while these do not produce any effect on those who do not agree with them in those beliefs. Had there been any real effect of these imaginary things it must have been common to all nations of different persuasions and should not have been confined to one particular nation's belief and habits. For although the degree of the strength of effect varies according to the different capacities of persons subject to it, yet it is not dependent upon belief of a certain believer. Do you not see that if a poison be taken by any one, in the belief that it is a sweetmeat, it must produce its effects on the eater and kill him?'

Rammohun rejected the dogma of the supernatural power or miracle. He wrote: 'It is customary with common people labouring under whims that when they see any act or thing done or found, beyond their power of comprehension, or for which they cannot make out any obvious cause, they ascribe it to supernatural power or miracle. The secret lies in this, that in this world where things are mutually related to one another by a sequent relation of cause and effect, the existence of everything depends upon a certain cause and condition, so that if we take

into consideration the remote causes, we may see that in the existence of any one thing in nature, the whole universe is connected. But when for want of experience and through the influence of whims, the cause of a thing remains hidden to any one, another person having found it a good opportunity for achieving his object ascribes it to his own supernatural power and thereby attracts people to himself.'

Rammohun advocated the cultivation of inductive reasoning as a safeguard against erroneous belief in supernatural powers. 'Inductive reason', he wrote, 'may be a sufficient safeguard for intelligent people against being deceived by such supernatural works. The utmost which we can say on this matter is that in some instances, notwithstanding a keen and penetrative discretion, the cause of some wonderful things remains unknown to some people. In such cases, we ought to have recourse to our own intuition and put to it the following query, viz. whether it is compatible with reason to be convinced of our own inability to understand the cause or to attribute it to some impossible agency inconsistent with the law of nature.'

He pointed out the anomaly 'that although people in worldly transactions, without knowing a certain connection of one with another do not believe that one is the cause and the other the effect, yet when there is influence of religion and faith, they do not hesitate to call one the cause and the other the effect, notwithstanding there is no connection or sequence between the two. For instance, the removal of a calamity by the effect of *duas* or certain prayers or getting recovery from disease by the effect of certain charms, amulets, etc.'

Rammohun totally rejected the argument and the claim in favour of miracles and went so far as to assert that even God had no power to transgress laws. As he put it: 'It is an admitted fact that the Creator has no power to create impossible things; for instance co-partnership with God or non-existence of God or existence of two contradictories, etc.'

He also challenged the common belief that God's guidance is made known through the medium of prophets, and advanced rational arguments to prove that 'the advent of prophets and

revelation, like other things in nature, depend upon external causes without reference to God, i.e. they depend upon the invention of an inventor.'

I have dealt extensively with the contents of the *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin* with the purpose of presenting the fundamental religious thoughts of Rammohun in the first years of the nineteenth century. He had already by then arrived at the concept of a universal religion based on monotheism.

About this time Rammohun took an appointment in the Revenue Department of the East India Company. After serving at Bhagalpur, Ramgarh and other places, he went to Rangpur in northern Bengal in 1809 as an assistant to the revenue officer, Mr John Digby. He lived at Rangpur from 1809 to 1814, devoting his leisure to serious study and discussion. During this period he came into contact with Hariharananda Tirthaswami, an erudite Tantrik scholar, and with his help made a thorough study of the Tantrik literature. Rangpur, at that period, was some sort of a cosmopolitan centre where Muslims and Jains gathered for purposes of trade. Rammohun came in contact with the Jains and made a deep study of the *Kalpasutra* and other religious books of the Jains.

While at Rangpur, Rammohun took a lively interest in the political development in England and Europe. He used to read avidly all the journals and newspapers that Digby got from England, and thereby not only improved his knowledge of English which he had started to learn at the age of twenty-two, but also acquired considerable knowledge of European political thought. We learn from Digby that Rammohun was attracted by the political liberalism prevailing in Europe at that time.

Mission in Calcutta

In 1814 Digby left India for good and Rammohun resigned from the service he had held so long under the East India Company and settled down in Calcutta. He was by now fully equipped to take up his life's mission—to salvage India's deepest

realisations covered up for centuries by ritualism, superstitions and customs, and to harmonise them with the living thought-currents of the world and the new age.

The methodology followed by Rammohun was highly characteristic of him. He did not reject the authority of the Sastras offhand but maintained that man's highest realisation must be established not on the evidence of Sastras only but also on the basis of his common sense and rationality. In this he followed the Mimamsa method for arriving at truth—the method being to start with a particular piece of evidence found in Sastra, to doubt its validity and to question its authenticity, then begin a re-examination of the issue and thus arrive at a conclusion.

In the foreword to the Bengali translation of the Vedanta, which was published in 1815, Rammohun writes: 'We should follow the path determined by the Shastras and reason, and thereby receive full satisfaction in this world and the next.' In the introduction to the English version of the *Kenopanishad* he declared Sastra, reasoning and God's mercy as the three factors necessary for the determination of truth. He says, 'Perhaps the best method will be not to surrender ourselves completely in the hands of Shastras and reasoning but to illumine the reasoning, faculty and knowledge of morality by their light and then to depend upon the beneficence of the Almighty God.'

In the various treatises written by him and dealing with the Sastras, Rammohun often quoted these lines of Vasishtha: 'If a child says something reasonable it should be accepted, but if Brahma Himself says something unreasonable it should be discarded as a piece of straw.'

The Upanishad says that the senses, mind and intellect are the ways and means for the realisation of the Absolute. The Upanishad has nowhere laid down that Brahma-tattva, the knowledge of God, is supernatural and therefore beyond the reach of cognition, and that it has to be mastered on the authority of Sastras only. The Vedanta has also established the concept of the Absolute as the original cause of the universe from the evidence of birth, life and destruction. From this it is clear that the mind, intellect and examination constitute

the way of realising Brahma. Rammohun followed this methodology of rationalism in discerning and arriving at the truth. But nevertheless he did not ever reject the authority of the Sastras. He merely asserted that the teachings of the Sastras should be examined and understood before they are accepted.

In 1815 Rammohun founded a Sabha or association called the Atmiya Sabha through which he carried on agitation against Kulinism, the sale of girls, and the caste system, and worked unceasingly for the recognition of the right of Hindu women to the property of their fathers and husbands. This Atmiya Sabha came to an end in 1819. *John Bull*, the organ of British conservatism and colonialism, and *Samāchār Chandrikā*, the organ of Hindu orthodoxy opposed to liberalism, joined hands and made common cause against Rammohun. The Dharma Sabha of the orthodox Hindus also bitterly opposed him.

The Hindu orthodoxy clamoured for his blood although Rammohun had declared, 'I had never attacked Hindu religion, I had attacked only superstitions and bigotry.' When he was tirelessly working for the abolition of Suttee, the Dharma Sabha opposed him vehemently. It is interesting to note in this connection that Horace Heyman Wilson, the great orientalist, came to the conclusion that the abolition of Suttee would be an act of interference with the Hindu religion. Rammohun proved that it was not so. Francis Bhathie, an attorney of the Supreme Court of Calcutta, was employed by the Dharma Sabha to present the petition of the orthodox Hindus to Parliament soliciting the permission to burn the widows alive. Bhathie in the course of his speech in Calcutta said: 'I am now proceeding to England on your behalf, and to fulfil your wishes will spare no labour either of body or mind or speech. I go to witness that there shall be no negligence on my part.' But in spite of all the efforts of this worthy Britisher, Suttee was abolished due to the heroic efforts of Rammohun Roy.

In 1815 Rammohun translated the *Vedānta Sūtra* into Bengali and in 1816 he translated the *Vedānta Sār* into Bengali and the Vedanta into English. In the same year he translated the *Ishā* and *Kena* Upanishads into Bengali and English, and in 1817

the *Katha* and *Manduka* Upanishads into Bengali. These were the first efforts made for translating the Vedanta and Upanishads into Bengali and English. In 1823, Rammohun wrote a brochure entitled *The Encroachment on the Rights of the Hindu Females* in which he demanded that Hindu women should have rights in the properties of their fathers and husbands. In 1827 he edited and published the Sanskrit work *Vajrasuchi* of Mrityunjay, a treatise directed against the institution of caste.

Controversy with Christian Missionaries

In 1821, the Calcutta Unitarian Association was founded. Rammohun was the guiding spirit of the Association and financially supported it. The object of this association was an all-round improvement in the condition of the people of this country. The formulation of the aims and objects of the Association was from the pen of Rammohun. The formulation was a remarkable document and amazingly modern in its approach to the problem of the uplift of the masses. Here what is striking is that Rammohun, who was a deeply spiritual man, did not ignore the material and economic aspects of life, as is often the case with many exponents of the so-called spiritual outlook of life. He had thoroughly understood the inherent unity of the different aspects of an individual's life, and had grasped the truth that the salvation of man cannot be piecemeal but has to be total.

In the aims and objects of the Association, Rammohun wrote: 'And whatever, therefore, has a tendency to diffuse the benefits of education, to destroy ignorance and superstition, bigotry and fanaticism, to raise the standard of intellect, to purify the theories of morals, and to promote universal charity and practical benevolence...will be considered as within the scope of their design. The melioration of the physical condition of the numerous native population, the encouragement of the useful arts and of industrious habits amongst them and the consequent increase of their social and domestic comforts, the Committee

regards as legitimate objects of pursuit, as well as experience shows that it is only when the first wants of nature and society are fully supplied that the higher degree of improvement in the intellect, in morals and in religion, can be expected to follow.'

In this period Serampore in Bengal was the great centre of Christian missionaries. This early batch of missionaries comprised men of great learning and piety. To some of them, such as to Rev. William Carey, Bengal owes a deep debt of gratitude. But engaged as these missionaries were in the work of proselytisation they could not, in the nature of things, escape being tainted with sectarianism, and in their attack against Hinduism they often showed bias and lack of knowledge. Rammohun brought out two papers—*Bramhan Sebadhi* in Bengali and *Brahminical Magazine* in English, in which he defended Hindu Unitarianism and Vedanta against the attack of the Serampore Missionaries.

Rammohun was highly critical of the Christian doctrine of Trinitarianism. Great controversy waged between him and his friend Rev. Adam on one side, and Rev. Dr Ryland, Lt White and others on the other, on the question of Trinitarianism. In the *Asiatic Journal*, Rammohun refuted the mathematical arguments in favour of Trinitarianism advanced by a Christian missionary. He wrote: 'Some time ago I had a divine adduce mathematical argument in support of the Trinity...It is as follows: that as three lines compose one triangle, so three persons compose one Deity. It is astonishing that a mind so conversant with mathematical truth as was that of Sir Isaac Newton did not discover this argument in favour of the possible existence of a Trinity, brought to light by Trinitarians, considering that it must have lain so much in his way. This analogy between the Godhead and a triangle, in the first instance, denies to God, equally with a line, real existence; for extension of all kinds abstracted from position or relative situation, exists only in idea.

'Secondly, it destroys the unity which they attempt to establish between Father, Son and Holy Ghost, for the three sides of a triangle are conceived of as separate existents.

‘Thirdly, it denies each of the three persons of God—the epithet “God”, inasmuch as each side cannot be designated a triangle.

‘Fourthly, it will afford to that sect among Hindus who suppose God to consist of four persons or “Chaturbuhatmok” an opportunity of using the same mode of arguing to show the reasonableness of their sentiments by comparing the Compound Deity with the four sides of a quadrilateral figure.

‘Fifthly, this manner of arguing may be esteemed better adapted to support the polytheism of the majority of the Hindus who believe in numerous persons under Godhead.’

Rammohun Roy carried on his discussions with the missionaries from 1820 to 1823. In 1820 was published his booklet, *The Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness*. In the introduction to this book Rammohun Roy expressed his opinion against the doctrinal part of the New Testament—against dogma, mystery and miracle. The Rev. Deocar Schmidt, a Christian missionary, attacked Rammohun by calling him ‘heathen’ and ‘injurer of the cause of truth’. Rammohun replied to the Rev. Schmidt’s charges by *An Appeal to the Christian Public* in defence of the *Precepts of Jesus*. Dr Joshua Marshman wrote against this in *The Friend of India*. Rammohun replied by a *Second Appeal to the Christian Public*. It was published in 1821. Dr. Marshman again joined issue with Rammohun in *The Friend of India*. Rammohun’s *Final Appeal to the Christian Public* came out in January 1823. In the introduction to *The Precepts of Jesus*, Rammohun wrote: ‘I feel persuaded that by separating from the other matters contained in the New Testament, the moral precepts found in that book, these will be more likely to produce the desirable effect of improving the hearts and minds of men of different persuasions and degrees of understanding. For, historical and some other passages are liable to the doubts and disputes of free-thinkers and anti-Christians, especially miraculous relations, which are much less wonderful than the fabricated tales handed down to the natives of Asia, and consequently would be apt, at best to carry little weight with them. On the contrary, moral doctrines tending evidently to the maintenance of

the peace and harmony of mankind at large, are beyond the reach of metaphysical perversion, and intelligible alike to the learned and to the unlearned. This simple code of religion and morality is so admirably calculated to elevate men's ideals to high and liberal notions of God...and is also so well fitted to regulate the conduct of the human race in the discharge of their various duties to themselves, and to society, that I cannot but hope the best effects from its promulgation in the present form.'

The missionary press at Serampore persisted in its attack against Vedanta and Hindu Unitarianism, thus obliging Rammohun to defend them in *Brahminical Magazine*, No. 4, in November, 1823.

In the preface to this number, he wrote, 'Notwithstanding my humble suggestions in the third number of this Magazine, against the use of offensive expressions in religious controversy, I find, to my great surprise and concern, in a small tract lately issued from one of the missionary presses and distributed by missionary gentlemen, direct charges of *atheism* made against the doctrines of Vedas, and undeserved reflections on us as the followers. This has induced me to publish, after an interval of two years, the fourth number of the *Brahminical Magazine*.

'In accordance with the mild and liberal spirit of universal toleration, which is well-known to be a fundamental principle of Hinduism, I am far from wishing to oppose any system of religion, much less Christianity; and my regard for the feelings of its professors would restrain me from thus exposing its errors, were they not forced upon my notice by the indiscreet assault still made by Christian writers on the Hindoo religion...I shall still be extremely glad to enter upon a minute investigation of the comparative merits of our respective religions, more especially if the Christian writers carry on the controversy in moderate and decorous language, worthy of literary characters and sincere enquirers after truth.'

Failing to give cogent arguments against Rammohun's viewpoint on Trinitarianism, Dr Marshman attacked Hinduism in an unworthy manner., He said that Hinduism owed its origin to the 'Father of lies.' Rammohun said in reply, 'We must

recollect that we have engaged in solemn religious controversy and not in retorting abuse against each other.' Commenting on the controversy between the Christian missionaries and Rammohun, the Editor of the *India Gazette*, a journal, wrote referring to Rammohun: 'It still further exhibited the acuteness of his mind, the logical power of his intellect and the unrivalled good temper with which he could argue.'

This was the high standard maintained throughout by Rammohun Roy in polemical discussions. He was consistently dignified, with a pervading sense of humility, and because of it he was always open-minded and fair to his opponent. He never lost his temper during argument, even when the opponents abused him, as was the case with the Christian missionaries and the champions of orthodox Hinduism with whom Rammohun had carried on a polemical struggle for years. Every word he uttered and wrote breathed rationalism, universalism and charity.

Another quality of Rammohun was his absolute integrity. Once, during a discussion with the Christian missionaries, his right to discuss Christianity without reading the Bible in the original was questioned. Rammohun accepted the validity of that criticism, studied Latin and Greek as well as Hebrew, and for two years refrained from all discussions with the missionaries, as is clear from his own statement: 'This has induced me to publish after an interval of two years the fourth number of the *Brahminical Magazine*.' Rakhal Das Halder, a product of the renaissance started by Rammohun, wrote in his *Indian Dairy* on July 19, 1852, 'I had a conversation today with a Jew, who said that his maternal uncle was the person engaged by the great Rammohun Roy as a teacher of Hebrew in order that Rammohun might study the Bible in the original.' In the *Brahminical Magazine*, No. 4, Rammohun included an article written by him under the pen-name of Shivaprusad Shurma on November 15, 1823, which was entitled as 'Reasons of a Hindu for rejecting the Doctrines of Christianity'. In this article, he discussed problems relating to the Trinity and to the Atonement of Christ, both of which are considered integral parts of Christianity by

the Christians and showed the untenability of these two doctrines, with his usual mastery of logical analysis, rationality and clarity.

While upholding the teachings of the Vedanta against the scurrilous attacks on it by the missionaries, and rejecting the doctrines of Trinity and Atonement of Christ, Rammohun wrote the following in the introduction to *The Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness*: 'For these reasons, I decline entering into any discussion on those points, and confine my attention at present to the task of laying before my fellow-creatures the words of Christ, with a translation from the English into Sanskrit, and the language of Bengali.'

Rammohun's controversy with the Christian missionaries bore fruit in an unexpected quarter. The Reverend William Adam, a Baptist missionary, was fully convinced of the correctness of Rammohun's views on Unitarianism as against Trinitarianism, and openly avowed his rejection of the latter in favour of Unitarian Christianity. This caused a furore in the European society of Calcutta, and the Reverend Adam was dubbed the 'second fallen Adam'. The feeling ran so high that the then Bishop of Calcutta thought of getting the Rev. Adam deported from India on a charge of heresy. But, to his discomfiture, the Bishop learnt from the Attorney-General in England that those good old days were over when inquisition and *auto-da-fe* were prescribed correctives for those who left the fold of orthodox Christianity.

For upholding and preaching the teachings of Jesus Christ, while rejecting the theological dogmas of Christianity, *The Friend of India*, a journal published by the Serampore missionaries, published in its 20th number an article by 'A Christian Missionary' attacking Rammohun with un-Christian venom. In reply to this unbecoming exhibition of anger and hatred, Rammohun wrote in 1820, 'An Appeal to the Christian Public in defence of *The Precepts of Jesus*. This pamphlet is a masterpiece of sound reasoning, analytical judgement and dignified restraint.

'In perusing the twentieth number of *The Friend of India*,

wrote Rammohun Roy, 'I felt as much surprised as disappointed at some remarks made in that magazine by a gentleman under the signature of "A Christian Missionary", on a late publication entitled "The Precepts of Jesus"; and also at some observations of a similar nature on the same subject by the editor of that publication. Before, however, I attempt to inquire into the ground upon which their objections to the work in question are founded, I humbly beg to appeal to the public against the unchristianlike, as well as uncivil manner in which the Editor had adduced his objections to the compilation, by introducing personality, and applying the term of *heathen* to the Compiler. I say unchristianlike manner, because the Editor, by making use of the term *heathen*, has, I presume, violated truth, charity, and liberality, which are essential to Christianity in every sense of the word... I should hope neither the Reviewer nor the Editor can be justified in inferring the heathenism of the Compiler from the facts of his extracting and publishing the moral doctrines of the New Testament under the title of "A Guide to Peace and Happiness", his styling "The Precepts of Jesus" a code of religion and morality, his believing God to be the Author and Preserver of the Universe, or his considering those sayings as adapted to regulate the conduct of the whole human race in the discharge of all the duties required of them.'

Rammohun's 'sin' in the eyes of the Christian missionaries lay in his attempt to separate the moral teachings of Christ from the dogmas and cults to be found in the New Testament and in his assertion that the teachings of Christ have a universal message for mankind, whereas the dogmas and cults of institutional Christianity are a positive hindrance to the acceptance of the great teachings of Christ. For this attempt, Rammohun was branded by the missionaries as an 'injurer of the cause of Truth'.

Rammohun concluded this appeal with these memorable words: 'May God render religion destructive of differences and dislike between man and man, and conducive to the peace and union of mankind.' The germinal beginning of a universal religion is clearly noticeable here. Rammohun's critical analysis

of the doctrines of Atonement, Trinity, etc. shows his profound knowledge of the Christian theology. Armed with this knowledge he fought against the narrow and motivated attack of Christian missionaries against the Vedanta and the Hindu religion.

Though Rammohun was savagely attacked by the Christian missionaries in India, his writings were warmly appreciated in Europe and America. His first English publication on the Vedanta came out in 1816. It had drawn appreciative press notice in England as also on the Continent. *The Monthly Repository of Theology and General Literature* reviewed at length Rammohun's treatise on the Vedanta, and wrote *inter alia*: 'A Hindu Deist, Rammohun Roy, a Brahmin, has published a small work, in the present year, at Calcutta, entitled An Abridgment of the Vedanta, etc. It contains a collection of very remarkable texts from the Vedas, in which the principles of natural religion are delivered not without dignity; and which treat all worship to inferior beings, together with the observance of rites and seasons, and the distinctions of food, as the aids of an imperfect religion, which may be altogether disregarded by those who have attained to the knowledge and love of God.'

Abbé Gregoire, the Bishop of Blois, in a pamphlet written in French made the following interesting references to Rammohun: 'Every six months he publishes a little tract in Bengali and in English developing his system of theism... he takes pleasure in controversy, but although far from deficient in philosophy, or in knowledge, he distinguishes himself more by his logical mode of reasoning than by his general views... He asserts likewise that he has found nothing in European books equal to the scholastic philosophy of the Hindoos.'

In a letter written by Rammohun Roy from Calcutta to Dr T. Rees of London on June 4, 1824, we read: 'Reverend Sir, I received your letter of the 16th June last, accompanied by a parcel of books to my address, with feelings of peculiar gratification. I cannot but be proud of the honour which the Committee have conferred upon me in reprinting my compilation

of "The Precepts of Jesus", and the two Appeals in its defence. I beg you will oblige me by communicating to the members my warm acknowledgments for so distinguished a mark of their approbation. . . . I have no language to express the happiness I derive from the idea that so many friends of truth, both in England and America, are engaged in attempting to free the originally pure, simple and practical religion of Christ from the heathenish doctrines and absurd notions gradually introduced under the Roman power; and I sincerely pray that the success of those gentlemen may be as great as (if not greater than) that of Luther and others, to whom the religious world is indebted for laying the first stone of religious reformation, and having recommended the system of distinguishing divine authority from human creeds, and the practice of benevolence from ridiculous outward observances.'

Rammohun's treatises on Christianity and the Vedanta had reached America where Thoreau and the Transcendentalists were much impressed by his writings. The 'Roy School' of thought flourished in the States and Moncure Daniel Conway wrote in the *Open Court* in 1894: 'It was Rammohun Roy who really caused the organisation of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association. Some adherents of the Hindu teacher started theistic movements in various places, and those of Madras communicated with Mr. Fox. In September, 1820, the Parliament Court sent five guineas to the native Unitarians of Madras, and in 1824, twenty pounds were contributed to build an Anglo-Indian Unitarian Chapel in Calcutta. It was these facts and the religious Hindu poetry translated by Rammohun Roy which awakened Mr. Fox to a unity larger than Unitarianism . . . That Hindu was, in fact, as a religious thinker, without a peer in Christendom. With him began the reaction of oriental on occidental thought which has since been so fruitful. . . . On May 25th, 1831, the Association held its sixth anniversary in South Place Chapel and Raja Rammohun Roy . . . arrived just in time to be present. There were present Unitarians from France and Transylvania; and Dr. Kirkland, President of the Harvard University, was there. Rammohun Roy spoke briefly but

impressively, and filled all present with enthusiasm by the charm of his personality.'

It should be remembered that Rammohun was equally critical of the dogmas and cults that shrouded the religious concepts of the Hindus. He was not one of those who to defend the Vedanta and Hindu religion from the attacks of the Christian missionaries would justify dogmas and cults and every aberration of Hindu religion. He never suffered from this bias, so unworthy of a seeker of Truth and so frequently found in the approach to religious problems by religious partisans. He had strongly but always with his characteristic restraint and dignity criticised the dogmas and cults that vitiated the supreme religious thoughts of the Hindus and never tried to defend them in the spirit of sectarian partisanship.

Rammohun was a seeker of universal religion. He was the first to make a comparative study of the four world religions—Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism and Christianity—and sought to discover the unity among them in their fundamentals. His was not a syncretic approach to world-religions but a synthetic approach. According to Professor Monier-Williams, he was a pioneer in our world of the comparative study of religions, and Max Müller considered Rammohun to be the first man to effect a synthesis between the East and West. Rammohun had fully realised that to bring these religions to a relationship of universal harmony, reform was necessary. Dr Brajendra Nath Seal, in his masterly exposition on this particular aspect of Rammohun Roy's thoughts and activities, has shown how he was 'the precursor and in a very real sense the father of Modern India'.

The tribute which his friend and co-worker in Calcutta, the Rev. William Adam, paid him is worth quoting in this context: 'He would be free, or not be at all. He must breathe an atmosphere of freedom, and not finding one ready-made to his hand, he made one for himself. He felt with the old English poet, "My mind to me a Kingdom is", and from this free domain, he unweariedly directed his attacks against those systems of spiritual, social, and political oppression of which,

by the necessity of circumstances, he was part and parcel, either as actor or sufferer, as priest or victim: and most earnestly—to his high honour be it spoken—against that system of spiritual and social tyranny which conferred on himself peculiar and invidious and pernicious distinctions and privileges. Love of freedom was, perhaps, the strongest passion of his soul—freedom not of the body merely, but of the mind—freedom not of action merely, but of thought. Almost instinctively he tore away and trampled under the foot the fetters which the religion of his own people, the usages of his own country, his family, descent, and his personal position, had imposed. If obstacles arose in his path, he fearlessly overturned them. If an attack was made even by implication merely, on his mental freedom, he resisted it with an irrepressible sense of deep injury and insult... This tenacity of personal independence, this sensitive jealousy of the slightest approach to an encroachment on his mental freedom was accompanied with a very nice perception of equal rights of others, even of those who differed most widely from him in religion and politics, and still more remarkably even of those whom the laws of nature and of society subjected to his undisputed control... This love of freedom, so strikingly characteristic of the man... was a rational conviction springing from his belief in the noble purposes which a well-regulated and self-restrained liberty is capable of conferring on the individual and on society. He did not seek to limit the enjoyment of it to any class, or colour, or race, or nation, or religion. His sympathies embraced all mankind.'

Educational Reform

Rammohun realised that without a radical reform of the educational system prevailing in India at that time, it would not be possible to awaken the nation from the slumber of centuries. The entire education system needed to be overhauled. What was needed was a rational and scientific education so that India could once again occupy her rightful place in the comity of nations.

When the Company Government decided to establish a Sanskrit School under Hindu pandits to impart such knowledge as was already current in India, Rammohun protested against this decision. He wanted the natural sciences, physics, chemistry, mathematics, etc., to be taught. On 11 December, 1823 he addressed a letter to the Governor-General, Lord Amherst, in course of which he said: '... the Government are establishing a Sangskrit School under Hindoo Pundits to impart such knowledge as is already current in India. This seminary (similar in character to those which existed in Europe before the time of Lord Bacon) can only be expected to load the minds of youth with grammatical niceties and metaphysical distinctions of little or no practicable use... to society. The pupils will there acquire what was known two thousand years ago, with the addition of vain and empty subtelties since produced by speculative men, such as is already commonly taught in all parts of India... If it had been intended to keep the British nation in ignorance of real knowledge the Baconian philosophy would not have been allowed to displace the system of the schoolmen, which was the best calculated to perpetuate ignorance. In the same manner, the Sangskrit system of education would be best calculated to keep this country in darkness, if such has been the policy of the British Legislature. But as the improvement of the British native population is the object of the Government, it will consequently promote a more liberal and enlightened system of instruction, embracing mathematics, natural philosophy, chemistry and anatomy, with other useful sciences which may be accomplished with the sum proposed by employing a few gentlemen of talents and learning, educated in Europe, and providing a college furnished with the necessary books, instruments and other apparatus.'

Bishop Heber, the Metropolitan of India, put this letter in the hands of Lord Amherst. J. H. Harrison, the President of General Committee of Public Instructions, wrote that 'It was entitled to no reply'. The Education Commission, appointed by Lord Ripon in 1882, reported: 'It took 12 years of controversy, the advocacy of Macaulay and a decisive action of

new Governor-General, before the Committee could, as a body, acquiesce in the policy urged by him (Rammohun).’ This advocacy of scientific education *vis-a-vis* the ‘tol’ system of education by Rammohun had been misinterpreted, misrepresented and viciously attacked by men upholding the traditional system of education. Calumny against Rammohun was spread far and wide that he had attacked Sanskrit and wanted to eliminate Sanskrit altogether from our educational system. This monstrous falsehood was levelled against a man who had established the Vedanta College in 1825 for the study of Sanskrit literature and for the defence of Hindu Unitarianism. William Adam in a letter, dated 27 July, 1826, wrote: ‘Rammohun Roy has lately built a small but very neat and handsome college which he calls the Vedanta College, in which a few youths are at present instructed by a very eminent Pandit, in Sanskrit literature, with a view to the propagation and defence of *Hindu* Unitarianism. With this institution he is also willing to connect instructions in European science and learning, and in *Christian* Unitarianism, provided the instructions are conveyed in the Bengali or Sanskrit language.’

Rammohun was very keen that scientific education be introduced to India so that people by the study of science might throw off superstition, bred of ignorance, and take to the path of enlightenment as was being done in the countries of Europe where scientific education was replacing the educational system of the Church. When the Hindu College was established in 1816, he joined hands with David Hare and others. But as the orthodox section of the Hindus objected to Rammohun’s participation in founding the Hindu College, he withdrew voluntarily. There is not the slightest doubt that Rammohun was one of the chief inspirers of the project of the Hindu College.

Sir Hyde East, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, at whose house a meeting was held on the 14th of May, 1816, for taking the decision for the establishment of the Hindu College, wrote, four days later, to one Mr J. Harrington, a Judge in England, a most interesting letter in which he said: ‘An interesting and

curious scene has lately been exhibited here, which shows that all things pass under change in due season. About the beginning of May, a Bramhan of Calcutta (Rammohun Roy), whom I knew, and who is well known for his intelligence and active interference among the principal Native inhabitants, and also intimate with many of our own gentlemen of distinction, called upon me and informed me, that many of the leading Hindus were desirous of forming an establishment for the education of their children in a liberal manner as practised by Europeans of condition; and desired that I would lend them my aid towards it by having a meeting held under my sanction....After his departure I communicated to the Governor-General what had passed, who laid my communication before the Supreme Council, all the members of which approved of the course I had taken, and signified through his Lordship, that they saw no objection to my permitting the parties to meet at my house... The meeting was accordingly held at my house on the 14th of May, 1816, at which fifty and upwards of the most respectable Hindu inhabitants of rank or wealth attended, including also the principal Pandits; when a sum of nearly half a lakh of rupees was subscribed and many more subscriptions were promised... Talking afterwards with several of the company, before I proceeded to open the business of the day, I found that one of them in particular, a Brahmin of good caste, and a man of wealth and influence, was mostly set against Rammohun Roy...who had lately written against the Hindu idolatry and upbraids his countrymen pretty sharply.'

This quotation leaves no doubt that Rammohun was one of the principal initiators of the scheme of Hindu College, that he voluntarily dissociated himself from it when the scheme was endangered and faced debacle if he participated in it.

In 1822, Rammohun started the High English School under the auspices of the Unitarian Association, and bore all the expenses himself. David Hare and Rev. Adam were in the management. Maharshi Debendranath Tagore was a student in this school. While in other schools science was taught in English, in this school science was taught in Bengali. In December,

1821, Rammohun published the Bengali weekly, *Sambad Kaumudi*. In one of the numbers of this weekly he wrote an article appealing to the Government for the establishment of a school for imparting free instruction to the children of poor Hindus. During the years 1821-24, he published in his weekly paper several articles on scientific subjects, such as, 'Echo in Acoustics', 'Properties of the Magnet', 'Behaviour of Fishes', 'Description of a Balloon', etc. Rammohun wrote text-books in Bengali on grammar, geography, astronomy and geometry.

Rammohun's pleading for the introduction of the teaching of mathematics, natural science, chemistry, etc. bore fruit, long after his death. There is not a shadow of doubt that it is he who initiated the movement for the introduction of scientific education in India.

Father of Bengali Prose

The Bengali prose of the early nineteenth century was mostly a jumble of Sanskrit words and was pitiably amorphous in form. It was then at the complete mercy of the pundits who vied with each other in introducing as many Sanskrit words as possible. This Sanskritised Bengali prose of the early nineteenth century was anything but Bengali in form.

Bengali prose was initially sponsored by the missionaries of Serampore and the pundits of the Fort William College. While the missionaries were interested in it as a vehicle for spreading Christianity amongst the natives of Bengal, the Fort William College run by the government wanted to utilise the Bengali prose for the purposes of administration. Young British officers were taught Bengali so that they might come into direct contact with the people of the land.

Halhed's *Bengali Grammar* (in English) was published in 1778. On its title page it is written that the grammar is for the benefit of the Feringhis (*Firinginām Upakārārtha*). The next attempt was made by the illustrious missionary, Dr William Carey of the Serampore Mission. Carey's Bengali grammar

was published in 1801. This, too, was written in English for the express purpose of acquainting newly recruited British 'Writers' with the 'native' tongue.

But the first attempt to write a Bengali grammar in Bengali for the people of Bengal was undertaken by Rammohun Roy. Prior to his leaving India for England, Rammohun wrote a 'grammar of the Bengali language' (*Gaudiya Vyakaran*). It was published by the Calcutta School Book Society in 1833. It comprised eleven chapters dealing with sixty-eight topics—from the necessity and purpose of grammar to rhyme.

The first book in Bengali prose was published in 1801. It was a text-book written for the foreigners by one Ramram Basu. In 1802 Pundit Mrityunjay Vidyalankar published *Batris Simhāsan*. It was certainly an improvement on Ramram Basu's *Pratāpāditya Charita*. Nevertheless Vidyalankar's book was replete with Sanskrit words and was, moreover, a text-book. Bengali prose writing in this period was entirely limited to text-book writing.

A revolutionary change was noticeable in Bengali prose with the advent of Rammohun in the field of Bengali literature. In 1815 was published the *Vedanta Grantha*, the first prose work of Rammohun. It was a complete departure from the extant Bengali prose writings. It was not a text-book but was an original writing in Bengali prose. Moreover, it was not made cumbersome with incomprehensible Sanskrit words. It was Bengali prose in the truest sense of the word. In the Introduction to this book Rammohun even gave the readers instructions on how to read Bengali prose written by him, and also explained the rules to be followed in constructing a sentence in prose.

This introduction is a remarkable testimony of Rammohun's clear thinking and originality. The excellence that the Bengali prose achieved in literary form under Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Rabindranath Tagore was built up entirely on the foundation of the Bengali prose form created by Rammohun Roy.

Dhrupad Songs in Bengali

In the sphere of music Rammohun's contribution is significant. The types of songs that were prevalent in Bengal in the first two decades of the nineteenth century were mostly cast in *thumri*, *tappā*, *kīrtan* and *Ramprasādī* modes. There were also *bāul*, *sāri*, *jāri* and other varieties of folk-songs. But *dhrupad* songs in Bengali language were unknown in this period. Such *dhrupad* songs as were heard were all in Hindi. Rammohun was the first to compose *dhrupad* songs in Bengali. That was in 1828. He felt the need of introducing this style of song noted for its depth, simplicity, absence of decorative tonal effusion and sombre grandeur, in his Brahma Sabha meetings. *Tappā* and *thumri* he considered too light and frolicsome for such occasions. He composed thirty-two *dhrupad* songs in Bengali for his Brahma Sabha gatherings. After him the Brahmo Samaj took it up and, under the guidance of Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, it enriched *dhrupad* songs in Bengali beyond measure.

Zeal for Political Reform

Rammohun had not the slightest doubt in his mind that the changes that he wanted to bring about in the religious and social systems of his country would exert beneficial influence on the political advancement of India. In 1828 he wrote: 'I regret to say that the present system of religion adhered to by the Hindus is not well calculated to promote their political interests. The distinction of castes, introducing innumerable divisions among them, has entirely deprived them of political feeling, and the multitude of religious rites and ceremonies and the law of purification have totally disqualified them from undertaking any difficult enterprise. It is, I think, necessary that some changes should take place in their religion at least for the sake of their political advantage and social comfort.' Rammohun, therefore, fully recognised the inter-relation between religious reformation and political and social progress.

In 1821-22 Rammohun founded two weeklies, *Sambad Kaumudi* in Bengali and *Mirat-ul-Akhbar* in Persian. In the first number of the *Sambad Kaumudi* he had written an article in praise of trial by Jury and in defence of the freedom of the Press. Trial by Jury was introduced in 1726, with the establishment of the Mayor's Courts. The same practice continued when the Supreme Court replaced the Mayor's Courts in 1774. Mr Wynn introduced the Indian Jury Bill which was passed by Parliament on 5 May, 1826. But there was discrimination against the Indians in the Act. The Indians were allowed to sit on the Petty Jury only, not on Grand Juries, and not at the trials of Christians. Rammohun carried on ceaseless propaganda against this discrimination against the Indians.

He sponsored a petition to the British Parliament signed by both Hindus and Moslems, which he forwarded with a covering note written by himself. The petition was presented to the Parliament on 5 June, 1829 and on 18 June, 1832 Grant's East India Justice of Peace and Jury Bill was passed. *Samachar Darpan*, the Serampore paper of the missionaries, congratulated Rammohun on the passing of this Act.

Censorship of the press was first introduced in Lord Wellesly's period. Though later removed by Lord Moira in 1818, a regulation against the press was imposed by Mr John Adam, the acting Governor-General in 1823. One of the members of the Governor-General's Council, W. B. Bayley, supported the cancellation of the freedom of the press on the ground that the native press was abusing the privilege. He referred to *Mirat-ul-Akhbar*. With the imposition of the press regulation in March, 1823, Rammohun stopped the publication of the *Mirat-ul-Akhbar*. Certain observations made by him on the doctrines of Trinity and published in the *Mirat-ul-Akhbar* in August, 1822, were deemed by the authorities as 'exceedingly offensive'.

In the Minutes of the Supreme Council of 10 October, 1822, we find the following remarks: '...the contents of the other Persian paper, the *Mirat-ul-Akhbar*, have been much in the same style as the above, but the Editor's known disposition for theo-

logical controversy had led him to seize an occasion for publishing remarks on the Trinity, which, although covertly and insidiously conveyed, strike me as being exceedingly offensive.' On 12 February, 1823, J. S. Buckingham, Editor of the *Calcutta Journal*, was ordered to leave India within two months. He had published certain articles in his journal which were considered to be offensive by the Government, in particular an article criticising Dr Bryce, the Head Minister of the New Church of Scotland, for his acceptance of the post of Clerk of the Stationery under the East India Company. In the opinion of Buckingham the acceptance of such a post by a Minister of the Church was unworthy of him. For this article Buckingham was ordered on 12 February, 1823, to leave India within two months.

This order was given by J. Adam, who after the departure of Lord Hastings, officiated temporarily as the Governor-General. The *Calcutta Journal* was forced to close down and Mr Sandford Arnot, the Assistant Editor, was arrested and deported from India. On 14 March, 1823, Mr Adam promulgated a new Press Ordinance which made it obligatory for the proprietors and the editors of newspapers to procure licences from the Government. On 17 March, 1823, only two days after the Rule was laid before the Supreme Court for registration, Rammohun, Dwarkanath Tagore, Prosanna Kumar Tagore, and three others submitted a petition to the Supreme Court and to the King in Council objecting to the Rule. In this remarkable petition drafted by Rammohun we read *inter alia* the following: '...a complete stop will be put to the diffusion of knowledge and consequent mental improvement now going on, either by translations into the popular dialect of this country from the learned languages of the East, or by the circulation of literary intelligence drawn from foreign publications . . . Another evil of equal importance in the eyes of a just Ruler is, that it will also preclude the natives from making the Government readily acquainted with the errors and injustice that may be committed by its Executive Officers in the various parts of this extensive country; and it will also preclude the Natives from communi-

cating frankly and honestly to their Gracious Sovereign in England and his Council, the real condition of His Majesty's faithful subjects in this distant part of his dominions and the treatment they experience from the local Government. Since such information cannot in future be conveyed to England, as it is heretofore been, either by the translations from the Native publications inserted in the English Newspapers printed here and sent to Europe, or by the English publications which the Natives themselves had in contemplation to establish, before this Rule and Ordinance was proposed....

'Every good Ruler, who is convinced of the imperfection of human nature, and reverences the Eternal Governor of the world, must be conscious of the great liability to error in managing the affairs of a vast empire; and therefore, he will be anxious to afford to every individual the readiest means of bringing to his notice whatever may require his interference. To secure this important object, the unrestrained Liberty of Publication, is the only effectual means that can be employed.'

The Supreme Court rejected the petition, and as a protest Rammohun stopped the publication of his Persian weekly.

In his evidence before the Select Committee of the House of Commons in 1831, on the occasion of the renewal of the Charter of the East India Company, Rammohun suggested the appointment of Indians as Judicial Assessors and Joint Judges. He pleaded for regular public registers, and for the establishment of the Codes of Civil and Criminal laws. He also pleaded for the reduction of Government expenditure, abolition of the standing army and the formation of a Militia by the peasants, as well as the separation of the Executive from Judicial functions. He also suggested the investing of the village Panchayats or councils with the powers of the Jury.

The Bengali Spectator wrote in 1842: 'It is to him that we are in a great measure indebted for the concession in regard to the privileges contained in the late Charter (1833).' And the *Samachar Darpan* wrote: 'Should he be instrumental in securing these advantages to the country, not only the present but every future age will justly consider him a benefactor to the country.'

Rammohun's Secretary in England, Mr Arnot, has left on record Rammohun's opinion that forty years was the limit that he allowed for the working out of England's cultural and political mission in India. He believed that in that period England would be able to bring India into contact with world culture and the system of democratic Government.

Rammohun whole-heartedly supported the Reform Bill agitation in England. In his opinion the struggle between the reformers and the anti-reformers was nothing but a 'struggle between liberty and tyranny throughout the world; between justice and injustice, and between right and wrong. But... we clearly perceive that liberal principles in politics and religion have been long gradually but steadily gaining ground, notwithstanding the opposition and obstinacy of despots and bigots.'

Rammohun was very happy when, in June, 1832, the Lords finally passed the Bill. He wrote to his friend, William Rathbone: 'I am now happy on the complete success of the Reform Bill, notwithstanding the violent opposition and want of political principle on the part of aristocrats. The nation can no longer be a prey of the few who use to fill their purses at the expense, nay, to the ruin of the people, for a period upwards of 50 years.... As I publicly avowed that in the event of the Reform Bill being defeated I would renounce my connection with this country... thank Heaven, I can now feel proud of being one of your fellow-subjects, and heartily rejoice that I have the infinite happiness of witnessing the salvation of the nation, nay, of the whole world.'

Not for India alone but for every country of the world, Rammohun championed the struggle for freedom and democratic rights. In 1823, when the news of the liberation of the Spanish colonies of South America from the tyranny of Spain reached him and he gave a dinner to his friends, some one asked him why he celebrated the occasion. He said, 'What? Ought I to be insensible to the sufferings of my fellow-creatures, wherever they are, or howsoever unconnected by interests, religion or language?' An English friend of Rammohun

wrote in the *Edinburgh Magazine* in September, 1823: 'The lively interest he took in the progress of South American emancipation eminently marks the greatness and benevolence of his mind.'

Likewise, Rammohun was very happy to learn of the introduction of Constitutional Government in Portugal. He supported the struggle for freedom of the Greeks against the Turks. In Naples, soon after 1815, a Society called Carbonari was founded. It became very popular and in 1820-21 the 'Neapolitan Carbonari broke out in rebellion against the Bourbon Kings of Naples, claiming a constitution, equality among all classes, and the right of the people to decide their destiny. The uprising was crushed and Morelli and Silvati, two leaders of the insurrection, were hanged. This news pained Rammohun so much that cancelling an engagement he had with Mr Buckingham, he wrote to him on 11 August, 1821: 'I am afraid I must be under the necessity of denying myself the pleasure of your party this afternoon; more especially' as my mind is depressed by the late news from Europe... from the late unhappy news I am obliged to conclude that I shall not live to see liberty universally restored to the nations of Europe, and Asiatic nations, especially those that are European colonies, possessed of a greater degree of the same blessing than what they now enjoyed. Under these circumstances I consider the cause of the Neapolitans as my own and their enemies as ours. Enemies to liberty and friends of despotism have never been and never will be ultimately successful.'

Rammohun opposed the British occupation of Ireland and in his *Mirat-ul-Akhbar* he wrote against this. He sent funds for the relief of the famine-stricken people of Ireland. The message of the French Revolution stirred him to the depth, and he hurt his leg badly while he was getting down from the boat to salute the tri-colour flag of the French Revolution. Rammohun possessed a boundless love of freedom and this was the mainspring of all his activities—religious, social and political. And this love of freedom embraced entire mankind. He was the first man of the eighteenth century who had the true vision of an internationalist.

The letter which Rammohun addressed to Prince Talleyrand on 26 December, 1831, from London, requesting the French Foreign Minister to grant him a passport for France, is a document of unique importance. In this letter Rammohun Roy pleaded for the abolition of the passport system and said: 'Such a regulation is quite unknown even among the Nations of Asia (though extremely hostile to each other from religious prejudices and political dissensions), with the exception of China, a country noted for its extreme jealousy of foreigners and apprehensions of the introduction of new customs and ideas. I am, therefore, quite at a loss to conceive how it should exist among a people so famed as the French are for courtesy and liberality in all other matters. It is now generally admitted that not religion only but unbiased common sense as well as the accurate deductions of scientific research lead to the conclusion that all mankind are one great family of which numerous nations and tribes existing are only various branches. Hence enlightened men in all countries feel a wish to encourage and facilitate human intercourse in every manner by removing as far as possible all impediments to it in order to promote the reciprocal advantage and enjoyment of the whole human race.'

In the same letter Rammohun had broached the idea of a supra-national organisation for settling the disputes amongst nations. He wrote: 'I beg to observe that it appears to me, the aims of constitutional Government might be better attained by submitting every matter of political difference between two countries to a Congress composed of an equal number from the parliament of each; the decision of the majority to be acquiesced in by both nations and the Chairman to be chosen by each Nation alternately for one year, and the place of meeting to be one year within the limits of one country and next within those of the other... By such a Congress all matters of difference, whether political or commercial, affecting the Natives of any two civilised countries with constitutional Governments, might be settled amicably and justly to the satisfaction of both and profound peace and friendly feelings might be preserved between them from generation to generation.'

It is clear from these memorable lines that as early as 1831 Rammohun had visualised the necessity of a supra-national organisation for settling all disputes among nations and for furthering the cause of peace in the world. He had anticipated the birth of a League of Nations or a U.N.O. long before such an idea was dreamt of by any political thinker in any part of the world.

A Pioneer Journalist

The liberal upsurge that came in the wake of the manifold reforms—social, educational, economic, political and religious—initiated by Rammohun Roy urgently needed the service of a liberal press. The need of the time led to a general development of the Press in Bengal and specially in Calcutta.

The first liberal paper to be started in Calcutta in 1816 was the *Bangala Gazette*, a Bengali weekly. Its conductors were enthusiastic members of Rammohun's 'Atmiya Sabha'. It was in existence till 1820.

The Serampore Christian Mission started the *Samachar Darpan*, a Bengali weekly, in 1817 and also published an English journal, the *Friend of India*.

The first liberal paper in English, the *Calcutta Journal*, was published by James Silk Buckingham in October, 1818.

Sambad Kaumudi, a Bengali weekly, was started in 1820 by Tarachand Dutta and Bhabani Charan Bandyopadhyaya. When Bhabani Charan resigned from the editorship of this weekly, Rammohun took charge of it.

A weekly in Persian, the *Mirat-ul-Akhbar*, was started by Rammohun Roy. It ceased publication in 1823.

The organ of orthodox Hinduism was *Samachar Chandrika*.

Bengal Herald was started in May, 1829 by Dr R. M. Martin, a medical man who was greatly under the influence of Dwarkanath Tagore. Rammohun Roy and Dwarkanath Tagore were amongst the proprietors of this paper.

Nilratan Halidar, a follower of Rammohun, edited the weekly paper *Bangadoot* in Bengali, Persian and Nagri.

Bengal Hurkaru was started by one Samuel Smith, a bookseller and publisher. Dwarkanath Tagore helped the *Bengal Hurkaru* with large sums of money.

The *India Gazette* was started in 1831. Dwarkanath Tagore was one of its proprietors. It was one of the leading English papers of that time.

John Bull, the semi-official organ and a notoriously anti-liberal paper, was started in 1821. It was sold off in 1832. Stocqueler, a friend of Dwarkanath Tagore, bought this paper with the financial assistance of Dwarkanath Tagore. It changed its name and became the *Englishman*.

It must be said in passing that Dwarkanath Tagore, the grandfather of Rabindranath Tagore, was a man of extraordinary talent, wealth and influence. He was imbued with a liberal spirit and was a great admirer and devoted friend of Rammohun Roy. In all his reformist activities, Rammohun received the unstinted and loyal support of Dwarkanath Tagore.

Dwarkanath contributed greatly towards the establishment of the liberal Press of Calcutta in the early part of the nineteenth century. He did it with the purpose of creating and educating public opinion in support of the movement initiated by Rammohun Roy. It was Dwarkanath Tagore who invited and brought out to India, George Thompson, the celebrated liberal statesman, famous orator and a member of British Parliament, and strengthened the foundation of political liberalism initiated by Rammohun.

The Press in Bengal owes a great debt to the movement started by Rammohun Roy, and to the enlightened liberalism and far-sighted generosity of Dwarkanath Tagore.

Economic Reform

Rammohun worked incessantly for the amelioration of the miserable economic plight of the Indian people. In his evidence

before the Parliamentary Committee in 1832, Rammohun said: 'The condition of the cultivators is very miserable, they are placed at the mercy of the Zamindars' avarice and ambition ... the landlords have met with indulgence from Government in the assessment of their revenue while no part of it is extended towards the poor cultivator.' He pointed out that while the zamindars had greatly benefited by the Permanent Settlement of 1793, the poor peasants were not better off at all. The rent was exorbitantly high, it left hardly any surplus for the cultivators. Rammohun demanded not only the prohibition of any further rise in rent but also a reduction of rent. He suggested a Permanent Settlement with the Ryots so that the Zamindars could not raise the rent of land and harass the poor peasants. He also pointed out that the decrease in revenue due to a permanent fixation of the rent might be remedied by tax on luxury goods, and by the employment of Indians as Collectors in the place of high-salaried Europeans. He agitated against the zamindars' extortion of cess from the peasants who came to sell their crops or vegetables in the village markets which were owned by the zamindars.

Rammohun fought against the monopoly of the salt trade by the servants of the East India Company. They used to enhance the price of salt a thousand per cent above its natural price. About one lakh twenty five thousand labourers or Molunghees as they were called, were engaged in the manufacture of salt in Bengal, and they were in a state of virtual slavery. The government used to employ agents for the manufacture of salt. The salt was then carried to Calcutta and sold in large lots by periodical sales. The business was in the hands of a few rich Indians who used to corner salt and adulterate it before selling. The Company had imposed heavy import duty on foreign salt.

Rammohun agitated against salt monopoly, and argued that if the price of salt was reduced, its use would increase, that dearth of salt was felt by the entire people, that English salt, being cheaper and better, should be allowed to be imported, that Molunghees should be absorbed in agricultural work, and that adulteration was carried to such an extent that when

the final product reached the consumer it was hardly different from common earth. The Parliamentary Select Committee supported the anti-monopolistic stand of Rammohun Roy whose agitation thus bore fruit. The monopoly of the salt trade by the East India Company was done away with.

Rammohun was the first man to draw the attention of his countrymen to the economic drain of India carried on systematically by the British rulers. It was in the nature of a tribute taken from India by her conquerors. In his answers to questions on the 'Revenue System of India', Rammohun said that colossal sums of money were being taken out of India by Europeans retiring from services in India. He prepared some tables to prove this drain and wrote that 'by the evidence of Messrs. Lloyd and Melville (the Accountant-General and later the Auditor-General of the East India Company), recorded in the Minutes of the evidence taken before the Select Committee of the House of Lords, 23rd February, 1830, it appears that the proportion of the Indian revenues expended in England on the territorial account amounts, on an average, to 3 million pounds annually. It includes the expense at the Board of Control and India House, pay, absentee allowances and pensions of Civil and Military officers in Europe for services in India, with interest of money realised there, etc., besides £4,53,588 pounds for territorial stores consigned to India.'

In a letter of the Board of Directors to the Government of Bengal dated 28 June, 1810, and quoted in the work *On Colonial Policy as applicable to the Government of India*, by a very able servant of the Company holding a responsible position in Bengal, the Directors state that 'It is no extravagant assertion to advance, that the annual remittances to London on account of individuals have been at the rate of nearly 2 million pounds per annum for a series of years in the past' (page 70). From these and other authentic documents, the author calculates the amount of capital, or 'the aggregate of tribute, public and private, so withdrawn from India from 1765 to 1820, at 100 million pounds.'

In England a great tussle was going on between the Free

Traders and the Monopolists. Rammohun sided with the Free Traders against the Monopolists, and in this he was ably supported by Dwarkanath Tagore. Both of them had the vision to realise that through the occupation of India by the British, History was fulfilling the task of lifting India out of the stagnation in which she found herself in the last decade of Muslim Rule in India. India for quite a long time was standing aloof and outside the world historical current. England represented the historical force that was to throw India in the current of world-force in every sphere of her existence. In the economic sphere England unwittingly fulfilled the task of starting an Industrial Revolution. Rammohun and Dwarkanath both supported the setting up of industries by the English in Bengal's countryside, so that the peasants groaning under the constant tyranny of the zamindars could find the way out. The process, of course, was in the very nature of things a cruel one like all historical processes ushering in change, but it was an inevitable one. Nowhere in the world has the transition from a feudal economy to a capitalist economy been a soft and mild affair. In India also, it could not be otherwise. Rammohun supported this economic revolution in India and in this he received the most loyal support from his friend Dwarkanath Tagore.

Brahma Sabha and Brahmo Samaj

In 1827, the Rev. William Adam in a letter addressed to R. Dutton wrote the following regarding the Unitarian Association: 'Its present members are Theodore Dickens, a barrister of the Supreme Court; George James Gordon, a merchant of the firm of Mackintosh & Co; William Tate, an attorney; B. W. Macleod, a surgeon in the Company service; Norman Kerr, an uncovenanted servant of the Company; Rammohun Roy, Dwarkanath Thakoor, Prasunna Coomar Thakoor, Radhaprasad Roy (Rammohun's eldest son) and myself.'

The Unitarian Association withered away. After the failure of the Association, the followers of Rammohun felt the urgent

necessity of establishing an institution solely devoted to Unitarian and Monotheistic worship. Chandra Sekhar Deb, a disciple of Rammohun, entreated Rammohun to have a special place where the Unitarians could hold their Unitarian meetings without any hindrance. Rammohun accepted the suggestion of Chandra Sekhar Deb and, on 20 August, 1828, the Brahma Sabha was inaugurated. A house was rented from Ram Kamal Basu, a resident of Chandernagore, and well known in Calcutta as Firingi Kamal Basu, as he had business dealings with the Europeans. The rented house, the first abode of the Brahma Sabha, was at 48, Chitpore Road. Tarachand Chakrabarti, a disciple of Rammohun, was appointed as the first Secretary of the Sabha. The Brahma Sabha continued in this rented house for two years and then, on 23 January, 1830, it shifted to its own house. The inauguration of the Brahma Sabha led to the organisation of a rival association called the Dharma Sabha by the orthodox section of the Hindus. It was led by Radha Kanta Deb, the accredited leader of the orthodox Hindus.

On 23 January, 1830 the Brahma Sabha was shifted to its own house. Montgomery Martin, who was the only European present on the occasion of the Brahma Sabha's inauguration at the new building, has left an interesting account in his *History of British Colonies*. From that account we learn that about 500 Hindus were present on the day of the inaugural ceremony. Before the inaugural ceremony a Trust Deed of the Sabha was drawn up by Rammohun Roy on 8 January, 1830. The Trust Deed is a remarkable document, unique for its catholicity and universalism. In it we read *inter alia*: '...the trustees shall, at all times, permit the same building, land, tenements, hereditaments and premises, with their appurtenances, to be used, occupied, enjoyed, applied, and appropriated as, and for place of Public Meeting of all sorts and descriptions of people, without distinction, as shall behave and conduct themselves in an orderly, sober, religious and devout manner, for the worship and adoration of the Eternal, Unsearchable, and Immutable Being who is the Author and Preserver of the Universe... And...no object,

animate or inanimate, that has been, or is, or shall hereafter become, or be recognised as an object of worship, by any man, or set of men, shall be reviled, or slightly or contemptuously spoken of, or alluded to, either in preaching, praying, or in the hymns, or other modes of worship that may be delivered, made, or used in such worship, . . . but such as have a tendency to the promotion of the contemplation of the Author and Preserver of the Universe, to the promotion of charity, morality, piety, benevolence, virtue and the strengthening the bonds of union between men of all religious persuasions and creeds.'

It is clear from the text of the Trust Deed that Rammohun did not contemplate the Brahma Sabha as an institution of a new religious sect. He wanted the monotheists of all religions to use the premises of the Brahma Sabha as their own. He wanted this institution to be a meeting ground of the people of all religious denominations who believe in one God who is Formless, Eternal, Unsearchable and Immutable. Rammohun called himself a follower of the Universal Religion. He told one of his friends that after his death the Hindus would claim him as their own, the Muslim would do the same, and so also the Christians, but he belonged to no sect, he was the devotee of Universal Religion. M. G. Ranade, a pioneer of liberal reformism in the presidency of Bombay, said about this Trust Deed: 'Spirituality, the deep piety and universal toleration of this document represent an ideal of beauty and perfection which it may yet take many centuries before its full significance is understood by our people.' Ramananda Chatterjee, the great Indian Journalist, had said: 'At the time when he [Rammohun Roy] established the Brahmo Samaj he meant it to be simply a meeting ground for people of all sects who wished to unite for divine worship. Brahmarshi R. Venkata Ratnam, in his presidential address at the Theistic Conference held in Calcutta in 1906, said: 'As the immortal Trust Deed defined its object the Brahmo Samaj was to be a spiritual fraternity of all without any artificial distinction, for the worship of God, limited by no sectarian conception, tarnished by no sectarian rancour but fruitful in permitting the union of man with man, and the great

virtues of morality and piety, charity and benevolence.' And Keshub Chander Sen, the great Indian reformer, wrote in the *Indian Mirror*, on 1 July, 1865: 'He [Rammohun Roy] belonged to no existing sect, nor did he seek to found a new sect or originate a new creed, however refined and unexceptionable. His great ambition was to bring together men of all existing religious persuasions, irrespective of distinction of caste, colour or creed into a system of universal worship of one true God. Thus, his catholic heart belonged to no sect and to every sect; he was a member of no Church and yet of all Churches. He felt it his mission to construct a universal Church based on the principle of Unitarian worship.' Satish Chandra Chakraborti, a famous preacher of the Brahmo Samaj, said in a sermon delivered by him on 27 September, 1933: 'For Rammohun's idea was that his Samaj was to be, not a temple of a new sect, but the unifier of all India through the common worship of one God by the members of all denominations. We rarely realise the faith and vision of Rammohun, namely, that the Hindu, the Moslem and the Christian, each pursuing his faith, may unite in worship.'

I have extensively quoted the opinions of some of the leading men of this country with the purpose of clearly stating a fact of the greatest importance, namely that the Brahmo Samaj, which was the later development of the Brahma Sabha, was not a creation of Rammohun, either in thought or deed.

In the *Reformer* of 1831, a paper run by Prasanna Kumar Tagore, we read: 'The Brahma Sabha, a Vedant institution, was established in the year 1828, by our enlightened and celebrated countryman Baboo Rammohun Roy, in conjunction with several other intelligent Hindoos... Its meetings are held every Saturday evening at a well-known house in Chitpore Road, where preaching from the Vedant and singing psalms in praise of the one true God occupy the time of those who meet... Christians and men of every other persuasion are permitted to be present at the religious acts that are performed within this sanctuary.'

In the October 1847 number of the *Tattwabodhini Patrika* (journal founded by Maharshi Debendranath Tagore), we

read: 'At this place sometimes in the evening the Moslem and Christian boys used to chant the praise of God in Persian and English.' In the same *Patrika* of 1854, Akshoy Kumar Dutt, a celebrated writer and a disciple of Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, wrote the following: 'In his [Rammohun Roy] time the Acharyas of the Brahmo Samaj used to recite and explain the hymns from the Upanishad and other Sanskrit Shastras and conduct the worship of God. In the same way other nationalities besides Hindus used to come to the Brahmo Samaj and expressed their reverence for God by chanting God's praise in their own languages.'

It is crystal clear that if this Brahma Sabha, called later the Brahmo Samaj, was meant to be a religious organisation of a particular religious sect, then men of other religious persuasions could not have come and used this place as their place of worship.

After Rammohun had left India, the Brahma Sabha was called the Brahmo Samaj by those who ran the organisation. Rammohun had sent from England a devotional song written by him to his son in Calcutta to be sung in the Unitarian meeting place he had founded in 1830. In this letter he mentioned the words 'Brahmo Samaj'. But in the same letter he has first referred to the Brahma Sabha, and then calls it the Brahmo Samaj. This proves without the shadow of a doubt that the word 'Samaj' here is used not in the sense of a sectarian organisation but in the sense of an association of people. In this sense the word 'Samaj' is used even now.

Moreover, Brahma Sabha, this theistic organisation, preached the doctrines of Vedanta for a period of over fifteen years. Brahmo religion as a separate creed was not in existence then. Maharshi Debendranath Tagore with the help of some learned Pundits made a compilation from the Upanishads and other Sastras and the first treatise on Brahmo religion was brought into being in 1841. It was also in the same year that at a sitting of the Tattwabodhini Sabha the words 'the religion based on Vedant, was changed to Brahmo Dharma, and a covenant formed. The Brahmo religion and Brahmo Church thus came into being long after the death of Rammohun.

G. S. Leonard in his *A History of the Bramho Samaj—From its Rise to the Present Day*, published in 1879, writes: 'I embrace the Vedantic faith.' The words 'Vedantic faith', were changed afterwards to 'Brahmo Dharma' at a meeting of the Tattwabodhini Sabha held on 11th Pous, 1768 (A.D. 1846) at the proposition of Rajnarain Bose, seconded by Akshoya Kumar Dutt.

There was no Brahmo creed and consequently no rules for Brahmo ceremonies before 1841. The first Brahmo marriage according to the ceremonial rules of the Brahmo Samaj took place on 26 July, 1861.

The noble vision of Rammohun Roy—of creating a universal meeting ground of monotheists of all races—the Brahma Sabha—faded away when Rammohun left the shores of India, and was ultimately lost with his death. Its place was taken by the Brahmo Samaj, the meeting ground of only Hindu monotheists. This clipping of the wings of Rammohun's vision was conditioned by the historical development, and perhaps the historical necessity of that period. Nevertheless, it should be recognised that the universal vision of Rammohun was narrowed down, and a religious order, composed solely of Hindu unitarians, the Brahmos, was established. In this new orientation the principal rôle was played by Maharshi Debendranath Tagore.

Rammohun in England

On 15 November, 1830, Rammohun Roy sailed for England by the steamer *Albion*, arriving there on 8 April, 1831. Rammohun's fame had preceded him. In 1816 when his first English work on the Vedanta, *An Abridgment of the Vedant*, came out, it was reviewed at length by the *Monthly Repository of Theology and General Literature* of England. When his arrival in Liverpool was made known, almost all the celebrities of the town called on him. William Roscoe, the famous historian of the Medicis, who was seriously ill at that time, sent his son requesting Rammohun to visit him. Rammohun visited Roscoe in his sick-room and both of them held a most intimate and warm con-

versation. Roscoe's son, who was present during this interview, has left a memorable account of it: 'The interview will never be forgotten ... after the usual gesture of Eastern salutation, Rammohun said, "Happy and proud am I, proud and happy to behold a man whose fame has extended not only over Europe but over every part of the world." "I bless God", replied Roscoe, "that I have been permitted to live to see this day."' Roscoe who was in a state of paralysis for years, died soon after.

The object of Rammohun's visit to England was threefold. First, he wanted to submit a memorandum to the King of Great Britain on behalf of Akbar the Second, the then Emperor of Delhi. Secondly, to present a memorial to the House of Commons for the abolition of Suttee, and, thirdly, to be present in England during the approaching discussion in the House of Commons on the renewal of the East India Company's Charter. From Liverpool Rammohun went to London without any delay so that he might be present in the House of Commons at the second reading of the Reform Bill. He reached London late in the evening and being tired he had turned in when Jeremy Bentham, the great British philosopher, called on him at the hotel. Finding that Rammohun had already retired, Bentham left a note for him: 'Jeremy Bentham to his friend, Rammohun Roy'. Bentham admired Rammohun so deeply that on another occasion he left a note addressing Rammohun as his 'intensely-admired and dearly-beloved collaborator in the service of mankind'.

Soon after he reached England, Rammohun submitted the memorandum on the claims of the Emperor of Delhi to the Court of Directors of the East India Company and also to a number of influential persons in London. Though the claim of the Emperor of Delhi was not fully met, it was partially granted when on 13 February, 1833, the Court of Directors sanctioned an increment in the annual stipend of the Emperor of Delhi by three lakhs of rupees.

In London Rammohun was busily engaged meeting the distinguished men of England and holding political discussion with them. The Duke of Cumberland, the brother of the

King of England, introduced him to the House of Lords. And we learn from James Sutherland that 'it was the Raja's urgent solicitations which prevented the Tory Peers voting against the Indian Jury Bill.' Rammohun developed an intimate friendship with Lord Brougham, the champion of the abolition of slavery and the great upholder of popular education. The Directors of the East India Company entertained Rammohun on 6 July, 1831, at a dinner at the city of London tavern. The Chairman of the East India Company presided and proposed the health of Rammohun, complimenting him for the vast services he had rendered to the Indian community. Rammohun was assigned a seat at the coronation of William IV among the ambassadors of the crowned heads of Europe. The Royal Asiatic Society of London invited him to take part in its annual meeting where Rammohun proposed a vote of thanks to Henry Thomas Colebrooke, the great Orientalist. Rammohun also met Robert Owen, the humanitarian socialist, who tried his best to win over Rammohun to his point of view.

When Rammohun reached England the political life of the country was in a state of convulsion due to the Reform Bill agitation. The first bill which was introduced in March, 1831 was defeated in the Committee stage. This defeat led to the dissolution of Parliament. The second Reform Bill was passed by the new House of Commons on 26 September, 1831. But it was thrown out by the House of Lords in October. The third Reform Bill was again placed before the House of Commons and passed by it in March, 1832, and was then sent to the House of Lords. The people of England were greatly agitated and awaited the decision of the Lords 'in a wild fever of excitement'. This time the Lords yielded to the popular pressure and the Reform Bill was passed in June, 1832. Similar measures were enacted for Ireland and Scotland. Rammohun was greatly delighted with the passing of the Reform Bill as might be seen from his letter to William Rathbone, excerpts from which have already been quoted.

Rammohun had a great admiration for France, the land which had given the inspiring call for liberty, fraternity and

equality, and which in his own words was 'so richly adorned by the cultivation of the arts and sciences, and above all, blessed by the possession of a free constitution'. His name was well-known in the cultured circles of France, as some of his writings had already reached the shores of France as early as 1818. D Acosta, Editor of the *Calcutta Times*, had sent to Abbé Gregoire, Bishop of Blois, some of the philosophical and religious writings of Rammohun Roy, and through Abbé Gregoire Rammohun's name became extensively known in the intellectual circles of France. In a brochure on Rammohun, the Bishop wrote: 'The moderation with which he repels the attacks on his writings, the force of his arguments, and his profound knowledge of the sacred books of the Hindoos, are proofs of his fitness for the work he has undertaken; and the pecuniary sacrifices he has made show a disinterestedness which cannot be encouraged or admired too warmly.'

We learn that 'in the sitting of the Société Asiatique, dated 7 June, 1824, there was the question of nominating some Associate-Correspondents, and Monsieur Le Comte d'Hauterive and Barron de Sacy, formally proposed the conferring of the title to Pundit Rammohun Roy and the proposal was referred to a Commission composed of Messieurs Lanjuinais, Burnouf and Klaproth. On the 5th of July, 1824, M. Klaproth, in the name of the Commission, made a report on the literary titles of Pundit Rammohun Roy and proposed his name as an Associate-Correspondent. The conclusions of that report were submitted to the deliberation of the Council and the title of Associate-Correspondent was conferred on Rammohun Roy.' [Madame Morin's article in the December, 1933 number of *India and the World*].

Mr Lachlan, a retired English Officer, was given the charge to hand over personally the diploma of an honorary member of the Société Asiatique to Rammohun Roy. In an article in the *Revue Encyclopédique* [Paris] for 1924, Sismondi described Rammohun as 'A Brahmin whom those who know India agree in representing as one of the most virtuous and enlightened of men. Rammohun Roy is exerting himself to restore his

countrymen to the worship of one true God, and to the union of morality and religion.'

Rammohun Roy had an audience with the King of France on 14 October 1832. In December 1832, an article by Monsieur Pauthier was published in Paris which dealt elaborately with the various aspects of Rammohun's works.

In course of time the British Government recognised the right of Rammohun to represent the Emperor of Delhi as his special emissary and also recognised the title of Rajah conferred on him by the latter. At a levee held at the St James Palace Rammohun Roy was granted an audience by King William IV on 7 September, 1831 and was later invited by the King to a banquet on the occasion of the opening of the London Bridge. He was accepted as a member of the highest circles of English society. Quite a number of receptions were held in his honour in London where persons of eminence, such as Jeremy Bentham, and others, were present. At a reception organised by the British Unitarian Association, Dr Bowring, the biographer of Jeremy Bentham, welcomed Rammohun Roy with the following words: 'I am sure that it is impossible to give expression to those sentiments of interest and anticipation with which his advent here is associated in all our minds. I recollect some writers have indulged themselves with enquiring what they should feel, if any of those time-honoured men whose names have lived through the vicissitudes of ages, should appear among them. They have endeavoured to imagine what would be their sensations if Plato or Socrates or Milton or Newton were unexpectedly to honour them with their presence... It was with feeling such as they underwent that I was overwhelmed when I stretched out in your name the hand of welcome to the Rajah Rammohun Roy. In my mind the effect of distance is very like the effect of time; and he who comes among us from a country thousands of miles off must be looked upon with some interest as those illustrious men who lived thousands of years ago.'

Dr Kirkland, ex-President of Harvard University of the United States, who had participated in this reception, said that

‘The Rajah was an object of lively interest in America, and he was expected there with greatest anxiety.’ The Rev. W. G. Fox also paid a glowing tribute to Rammohun Roy. Rammohun replied to these felicitations in a speech which ended with these memorable words: ‘There is a battle going on between Reason and Scriptures, common sense and wealth, power and prejudice. These three have been struggling with the other three; but I am convinced that your success sooner or later is certain... Honour that you have from time to time conferred on me... I shall never forget to the last moment of my existence.’

Pecuniary anxieties and the strain of overwork had wrought havoc with the otherwise superb constitution of Rammohun. The financial difficulties were due to the failure of the Banking House of Messrs Mackintosh & Co., his Calcutta Agents, and Messrs Rickards Mackintosh & Co., his London Agents. He was persuaded by his friends to leave London and go to Bristol in early September, 1833, for change and rest in the house of Miss Castle who was a ward of his friend, Dr Lant Carpenter, Pastor of Bristol’s Lewin’s Mead Chapel. Rammohun was greatly relieved in the company of his friends, but on 19 September, he suddenly fell ill. He had high fever with severe headache. In the following days his condition worsened. Miss Hare, a sister of David Hare, nursed him during his illness. A number of eminent physicians attended on him, but all to no avail. His condition deteriorated rapidly. On the 27 September 1833, Rammohun passed away.

Dr Estlin, the physician who had attended him, wrote about the last hours: ‘It was a beautiful moonlight night; on one side of the window, as Mr. Hare, Miss Kiddell and I looked out of it, was the calm rural midnight scene; on the other, this extraordinary man dying. I shall never forget the moment. Miss Hare, now hopeless and overcome, could not summon courage to hang over the dying Rajah as she did while soothing or feeding him, ere hope had left her, and remained sobbing in the chair near;... At half-past two Mr. Hare came into my room and told me it was all over. His last breath was drawn at 2-25.’ And Miss Collect writes: ‘His utterance of the

sacred "AUM"—one of the last words he was heard to utter—suggested that at the solitary gate of death as well as in the crowded thoroughfare of life, the contemplation of Deity was the chief pre-occupation of his soul.'

He was interred at Stapleton Grove on 18 October, 1833, at about 2 p.m. Mary Carpenter who was present at the interment has given us a touching description of this event: 'At length all the preparations were made. The Messrs. Hare had come from London, and those only were invited to assemble at Stapleton Grove who had been personally connected with the Rajah. Miss Castle's guardian and immediate connections, the Messrs. Hare and their niece, who had attended on him in his last illness like a daughter, and young Raja Ram, his adopted son, with the Bramhin servants; the medical attendants, including Mr. Estlin with his venerable mother and young daughter; Dr. Jerrard, the celebrated John Foster; my father and myself. Soon after noon the shrine containing the mortal remains of that glorious spirit, slowly and solemnly, in the deepest silence, borne down the broad gravel walk followed by his mourning friends, who had but lately known him in earth above. The bearers wound along a shady walk which his foot had doubtless often trodden and there deposited their sacred burden in the appointed resting place. No voice ventured to express the deep thoughts which must have filled every breast: "Who could have spoken over such a grave afterwards", said John Foster.'

Many years after, in 1842, when Dwarkanath Tagore, the friend and disciple of Rammohun Roy, was in England, he had the coffin removed from Stapleton Grove to Arno's Vale, the cemetery on the outskirts of Bristol where on 29 May, 1843, Rammohun's mortal remains were interred and, in 1844, a beautiful structure in Indian style was erected over it.

Rammohun's Impact

Rammohun Roy's impact on his foreign admirers is well

summed up by his English biographer, Sophie Dobson Collet:

‘Rammohun stands in history as the living bridge over which India marches from her unmeasured past to her incalculable future. He was the arch which spanned the gulf that yawned between ancient caste and modern humanity, between superstition and science, between despotism and democracy, between immobile custom and a conservative progress, between . . . polytheism and . . . Theism. He was the mediator of his people harmonizing in his own person, often, by means of his own solitary sufferings, the conflicting tendencies of immemorial tradition and of inevitable enlightenment. . . . He embodies the new spirit which arises from the compulsory mixture of races and faiths and civilizations,—he embodies its freedom of enquiry, its thirst for science, its large human sympathy, its pure and sifted ethics, along with its reverent but not uncritical regard for the past, and prudent . . . disinclination towards revolt. But in the life of Rammohun we see, what we hope yet to have shown us in the progress of India, that the secret of the whole movement is religious. Amid all his wanderings Rammohun was saved by his faith . . . He was a genuine outgrowth of the old Hindu stock; in a soil watered by new influences, and in an atmosphere charged with unwonted forcing power, but still a true scion of the old stock. The Rajah was no merely occidentalized oriental, no Hindu polished into the doubtful semblance of a European. Just as little was he, if we may use the term without offence, a spiritual Eurasian. If we follow the right line of his development we shall find that he leads the way from the orientalism of the past, not to, but through Western culture, towards a civilization which is neither Western nor Eastern, but something vastly larger and nobler than both. He preserves continuity throughout, by virtue of his religion, which again supplied the motive force of his progressive movement. The power that connected and restrained, as well as widened and impelled, was religion.

‘Rammohun thus presents a most instructive and inspiring study for the New India of which he is the type and pioneer. He offers to the new democracy of the West a scarcely less

valuable index of what our greatest Eastern dependency may yet become under the imperial sway of the British commonalty. There can be little doubt that, whatever future the destinies may have in store for India, that future will be largely shaped by the life and work of Rammohun Roy. And not the future of India alone. We stand on the eve of an unprecedented intermingling of East and West. The European and the Asiatic streams of human development, which have often tinged each other before, are now approaching a confluence which bids fair to form the one ocean-river of the collective progress of mankind . . . The nearing dawn of these unmeasured possibilities only throws into clearer prominence the figure of the man whose life-story we have told. He was, if not the prophetic type, at least the precursive hint, of the change that is to come.'

Of his impact on the modern age in India, let Rabindranath Tagore's memorable words bear testimony:

'It takes time to understand and appreciate any rare personality who comes at an age when his country has lost itself and contradicts its own majesty. His voice sounds painfully discordant only because the people have allowed the strings of their own instrument to slacken, and fail to make them harmonise with the music of truth which once originated in the sublime height of their nature.

'Rammohun Roy was one such man who had been rudely rejected by his country, which refused to be reminded of the responsibility of its great inheritance while clinging with desperate infatuation to its degeneracy. But the occasion was urgent, and therefore his appearance in the midst of an angry annoyance was inevitable. He came to represent the change of season which must follow the long indigence of drought, and bring the wealth of shower which inspires in the heart of a parched up barrenness a magnificence of life. It seems like a bewildering surprise, such a shifting of scene, and its fulness of meaning must wait to be unfolded till the harvest ripens and the reapers no longer hesitate to acknowledge it. Rammohun came to his countrymen as an unwelcome accident stupendously out of proportion to his surroundings, and yet

he was the man for whom our history has been watching through the night,—the man who is to represent in his life the complete significance of the spirit and mission of the land to which he belonged. It was a lonely life, but it had for its comrades the noble path-seekers who preceded him in India, whose courage was supreme in their adventure of truth.

‘It is a matter of infinite wonder that at an obscure age of narrow provincialism Rammohun should be able to bring as a gift to his people who did not understand him, the mind that in its generous sympathy and understanding comprehended the best aspirations of the East and the West,—the mind that opened to itself the confluence of cultures on which have ever come sailing great epochs of civilisation. The vision of the modern age with its multitude of claim and activities shone clear before his mind’s eye, and it was he who truly introduced it to his country before that age itself completely found its own mind.’

Significant Dates and Events in Rammohun's Life

1772: Born on 22 May at Radhanagar.

1809: Appointed Dewan under John Digby, Collector at Rangpur.

1815: Took up residence in Calcutta.
Founded Atmiya Sabha.
Published *Vedanta Grantha* in Bengali.

1816: Wrote *Abridgement of the Vedanta* or *Vedanta Sar* and published it in Bengali, Hindusthani and English.
Translated *Kena* and *Isha Upanishads* into Bengali and English.

1817: Hindu College established.
Translated *Mandukya Upanishad* and *Katha Upanishad* into Bengali.

1818: Published his first tract on Suttee.

1820: Published *The Precepts of Jesus*.

1821: Rev. William Adam converted to Unitarianism.
Started *Sambad Kaumudi*.

1822: Started *Mirat-ul-Akhbar*.
Started Anglo-Hindu School.
Published *Brief Remarks on Ancient Female Rights*.

- 1823: Submitted memorial to Supreme Court against Press Ordinance.
Mirat-ul-Akhbar ceased publication.
Letter to Amherst pleading for promotion of a 'more liberal and enlightened system of instruction.'
- 1824: Elected member of Société Asiatique, Paris.
- 1826: Founded Vedanta College.
- 1828: Lord William Bentinck arrived in Calcutta as Governor-General.
Established Brahma Sabha.
Advocated Trial by Jury.
- 1830: Sailed for England in November.
- 1831: Arrived in England in April.
Met Jeremy Bentham in London.
Dined with East India Company.
Presented to King William IV.
Wrote to Talleyrand advocating abolition of passport system and the establishment of a supra-national organisation.
- 1832: Vigorously supported the Reform Bill which was passed.
Visited Paris and had audience with King Louis Philippe of France.
- 1833: Left London for Stapleton Hill near Bristol. Died on 27 September.

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In this short bibliography are mentioned only the collected editions of Raja Rammohun Roy's works in Bengali and English, and a select list of books on him in the same languages. For bibliographical information on his individual works in these and other languages, as well as for a fuller list of books on him, the interested reader is referred to 'A List of Raja Rammohun Roy's Publications in Different Languages' prepared by Dilip Kumar Biswas and Probhat Chandra Ganguli, and included in the third edition of Collet's *The Life and Letters of Raja Rammohun Roy*, which they have edited and which was published by the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj in 1962.

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The first collected edition of Rammohun's Bengali works was published in 1839 by Annada Prasad Banerji. Subsequently, the following have been published:

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